

March 2003

State Senator

Burton Leland

Reports to the people of the 5th Senate District

Newsletter

Senate District 5 is Bigger and Better Than Ever!

I have been honored to serve the constituents on the west side of Detroit for over 22 years, both in the House of Representatives and the Senate. I look forward to continuing to serve you over these next four years, sponsoring and supporting legislation that will make positive impacts in our community and our state.

I would also like to welcome our new district members from Inkster and Dearborn Heights. When our state was redistricted last year, we were fortunate to add these two communities to our District 5 family. I look forward to getting out into Dearborn Heights and Inkster to meet our new constituents and discuss how we can work together to meet the needs of these communities.

I am excited at the prospect of working with our new governor, Jennifer Granholm, over the next four years. This first year will provide us many opportunities to tackle the challenges that face our state. As the governor said in her State of the State address, "Only challenge produces the opportunity for greatness." I look forward to working with Governor Granholm and my Senate colleagues to help

our community and our state achieve great things in this coming year.

The following pages will provide you with information about some of the legislation I am currently supporting. I think these bills are important to both our state and our district. I encourage you to contact me if you have any questions about these bills or anything else we are working on in Lansing. I welcome your input and participation.

See you in the district!

Burton Leland

Senator Leland discusses legislation on the floor of the Senate Chamber.



How to Contact Senator Leland



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“No Reason”

Absentee Ballot Legislation Introduced In The Senate

Obtaining an absentee ballot could soon become much easier for Michigan residents. Legislation recently introduced by Senator Leland would allow voters to request an absentee ballot without having to provide a reason.



Currently, Michigan residents who wish to vote absentee must choose from a list of reasons indicating why they

will not be able to vote in person. “No reason” absentee voting makes elections more accessible and fair for all Michigan residents. Under this new legislation, a voter wishing to obtain

an absentee ballot would simply apply in person or by mail with the clerk of the township, city, or village in which they are registered to vote. No reason necessary.

Although the state does not track the number of absentee voters, individual city and township clerks keep records of the number of absentee ballots cast for each election. According to data from ten of Michigan’s largest cities, absentee voters accounted for an average of nearly 20 percent of the vote in the 1998 and 2000 general elections. In the 2000 general election, 18.4 percent of the total votes cast in Detroit were cast via absentee ballots.

People should not have to conform to a list of accepted reasons in order to participate in the electoral process. Removing this unnecessary barrier will make it easier and more efficient for Michigan citizens to exercise their right to vote.

Expanded Bottle Bill Will Help Clean Up Our City Streets

The empty water and juice bottles that litter the streets of our communities are a nuisance and an eyesore. Because these containers are currently not included in the bottle deposit program in Michigan, they are more likely to be strewn about our streets and yards and taking up space in our landfills. However, legislation recently introduced in the Michigan Senate could help clean up this problem.

Senator Leland is sponsoring legislation that would expand the current law to include fruit juice, tea, bottled water, and other similar noncarbonated beverage containers in the Michigan bottle deposit program.

Michigan was the first industrial state to implement a bottle bill in 1976. The reasons for the original legislation—to reduce litter, improve the environment, and conserve natural resources—are still important today. We must always be looking for

opportunities to improve and respond to the changes in the beverage industry and our consumption habits. The legislature did just this in 1988, ten years after the original bill was implemented, when it expanded the bottle bill to include wine coolers and canned cocktails. It’s time to make another change.

As our consumption of bottled water and juice beverages continues to increase, we must find a way to keep the containers from littering our roads, parks, playgrounds, and yards. Expanding the bottle bill to include these containers is the most obvious and effective solution.

Ten years after the initial bottle bill was enacted in Michigan, the Michigan Department of Transportation reported that bottle and can litter was reduced by 80 percent. There is no reason to believe that, if we add water, juice, and other beverage containers, we won’t achieve a similar result.

Better Staffing in Nursing Homes Will Improve The Quality of Care

Every day, Michigan families face difficult decisions about whether to move a loved one into a nursing home. The quality of care a resident receives in a nursing home is one of the most important factors families must consider and the ratio of staff to patients is a critical element in the level of care provided.

Legislation recently introduced by Senator Leland addresses the growing concerns of staffing ratios in Michigan nursing homes. Senate Bill 140 would require that the staff-to-patient ratio not fall below one care provider to 15 nursing home residents during any 24-hour period. This legislation would also require that there be at least one registered professional nurse or licensed practical nurse on duty at all times.

In a national study presented last year by the Department of Health and Human Services, it was reported that more than 90 percent of the nation's nursing homes have inadequate staffing. The study also confirmed what anyone living in a nursing home

can verify, that their health and care suffer when the facility in which they live is understaffed. This bill will help improve the care for the more than 50,000 nursing home patients in Michigan.

If you are in the process of selecting a nursing home for your loved one, the AARP suggests a few simple things you can do to help determine which facilities will provide the kind of care you are looking for:

- Visit the facility on different days and at different times and take note of staffing levels.
- Talk to staff members about how long they have worked at the facility.
- Ask the nursing home administrator about the staff-to-patient ratio.
- Get a copy of the most recent state survey of the facility.

Another source of information about nursing homes is the AARP publication, *Solving Nursing Home Problems: A Guide for Families* (D17065). You can also visit the AARP.org website's section on nursing homes.

Improved Bus Service for Metro Detroit Residents

Legislation to establish the Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority (DARTA) was reintroduced by Senator Leland in the first weeks of the 2003-2004 session of the Michigan Senate. DARTA was passed by both houses of the legislature last year but was vetoed by Governor Engler at the end of his term last December. DARTA will be a great benefit to the residents of metro Detroit. Senator Leland is working hard to get this important legislation enacted.

The establishment of DARTA is significant for Detroit area residents. The regional transit authority will improve bus service in Detroit, as well as integrate the city and suburban bus systems. DARTA will link the SMART system and the DDOT system

so riders will no longer have to jump from one to the other just to get to work.

Currently, the lines of the two systems do not cross. For riders from metro Detroit who want to get out to one of the suburbs, the journey can often be long and complicated. With DARTA, the two systems will overlap and use common stops. Riders will no longer have to take one bus system to the end of its line, walk to another stop, and pay another fare for another system just to reach their destination. DARTA will expand and improve transportation in metro Detroit, providing better service for the nearly 200,000 riders who depend on bus service every day.





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Burton Leland

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Town Hall Meeting Scheduled

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Senator Leland will be hosting his first town hall meeting of the year on **Saturday, March 29th** from **10:00 AM to noon**. All are welcome to attend the meeting at **St. Thomas Aquinas Church**, located at 5780 Evergreen, just south of Ford Road.

Hope to see you there!

FREE Publications Available

Please check the appropriate box(es) below, fill in your name and address in the space provided and return this entire coupon to: **State Senator Burton Leland, P.O. Box 30036, Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536** or you may fax your order to **(517) 373-5981**.

- ☐ **Changes and Choices, Legal Rights of Senior Adults**
- ☐ **Child Safety Coloring Book**
- ☐ **The Michigan Constitution**
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- ☐ **Consumer Information Book**
Protect yourself from fraud!
- ☐ **Domestic Violence, Stalking, Date Rape ... An Information Guide**
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How the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of state government work.
- ☐ **Michigan's Friend of the Court**
- ☐ **Getting to Know Michigan**
A coloring book for kids in grades 2 to 4.
- ☐ **The Legislative Process in Michigan - A Student's Guide**
Written for high school students and adults.
- ☐ **Movin' On: A Handbook for Young People**
A guide for teens graduating from high school.
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- ☐ **Portraits of Michigan**
Pictures and artwork about our State.
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- ☐ **Your Child - A Parent's Guide to Health and Safety**
Topics include selecting a day care provider, tracking immunizations, choosing a car seat, tax credits, and how to report child abuse.
- ☐ **Your State Capitol ... A Walking Tour**
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- ☐ **Michigan Taxpayer's Guide**
- ☐ **State Map**

Name _____ Address _____

City _____, MI Zip Code _____ Phone () _____